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WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2008

In Today's Papers

Bush and Gul Meet at the White House
All papers report on yesterday's meeting between President Bush and President Abdullah Gul at the White House. In a joint press availability after the meeting, Bush described Turkey as "a strategic partner of the United States," noting, "the PKK is our common enemy. It's an enemy to Turkey, it's an enemy to Iraq and it's an enemy to all people who want to live in peace. The US, along with Turkey, is confronting these folks." Bush praised Turkey as a "model for democracy" in the Muslim world and said it should be admitted to the EU as a "bridge" to the Islamic world. He underscored that Turkey's EU membership was "in the interest of peace." Bush also said they discussed securing energy resources as well as Middle East matters.

Gul told reporters that Turkey and the US are "longstanding allies" and that the two countries share "a common vision." He emphasized, "relations between the US and Turkey have regional and global impact. Our ties will continue to contribute to the growth of peace, stability and prosperity around the world." Gul noted his meeting with Bush focused on energy issues, the Middle East peace plan, Iraq, and the Balkans.

In a separate press event after his meeting with Bush, Gul told reporters that the sides are mutually satisfied in the cooperation against the "common enemy" PKK. Responding to questions, Gul said "the US bears a responsibility in fighting an organization included in the US terror list and combating terror activities in a country under US control." Gul told reporters the US was not pressing Turkey to seek a political settlement concerning the PKK question. "I saw that they trust Turkey. They know that the PKK is the sole target of the Turkish operations," said Gul.

Mainstream and conservative alike, most dailies comment Turkey-US ties are warming up. Mainstream Milliyet sees President Bush's remarks against the PKK as one of the most important results of the meeting. Mainstream Vatan quotes Turkish officials as saying the

Bush-Gul meeting has been the "least stressful" and satisfactory bilateral meeting in recent years. Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak writes Bush said they had "constructive" talks with Gul "like two friends." Vatan says the US put no pressure on Turkey to give something in exchange for support in the fight against the PKK, but suggested that speeding up social and cultural changes would contribute to the solution of the problem. Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet sees Gul's recent statement that Turkey's aid to Iraq would increase ten-fold after the PKK is taken out of the country as an indication of ongoing bargaining between the sides. Liberal Radikal reports that before the meeting, White House spokeswoman Dana Perino briefed reporters President Bush would tell President Gul that there is an opportunity to work on a "long-term political solution" with Iraq, including the people in the Kurdish region, President Talabani, and Prime Minister al-Maliki. Perino noted the goal was to work out a long-term settlement.

Meanwhile, President Gul had breakfast with Secretary Rice earlier in the day before coming together with Vice President Dick Cheney to discuss energy pipelines, the Kirkuk issue and the future of Iraqi oil. US sources told Yeni Safak that Cheney communicated US concerns regarding the natural gas deal signed between Turkey and Iran.

Editorial Commentary on Gul Visit to the US
Rusen Cakir wrote in mainstream Vatan (1/9): "The meeting between President Gul and President Bush demonstrated that bilateral ties are being restored. The Gul-Bush summit was stress-free because neither side complained or made demands. While the overall picture looks good, it is too early to be overly optimistic. First of all, the Bush Administration's time has expired and the US has entered into elections psychology. The new president, who is likely to be

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Democratic Senator Obama, will make serious changes to the Bush administration's policies. There are still fundamental differences of opinion between Ankara and Washington, particularly concerning the Middle East. Even though the Bush Administration works closely with Gul and the AKP, the administration does not necessarily trust them. There is a continuing rumor about 'Washington's push for a political solution to the PKK problem' in exchange for American intelligence support for military operations. Finally, we can talk about a thawing of relations in an atmosphere of spring, but we should wait longer and work more to see flowers blossom."

Mustafa Karaalioglu wrote in mainstream Star (1/9): "The Bush-Gul meeting shows there is a bridge of trust between the two countries; now the two countries pay attention to each other and listen to each other. Even the PKK issue has turned into a means to restore trust and cooperation. President Bush clearly expressed Washington's strong stance on the fight against PKK. It is also very important that Bush and Gul met right before President Bush's trip to the Middle East. This is a new era of quality bilateral ties, which will be the best legacy for an expiring Bush administration."

Sedat Ergin observed in mainstream Milliyet (1/9): "The Gul-Bush meeting was positive and the outcome can be observed as follows:
-- The cooperation against the PKK will continue with full speed. President Bush repeated his commitment to fight against the PKK. It appears this meeting will further isolate the PKK in the international arena.
-- President Bush emphasized religion by characterizing Turkey as a "fantastic" country where democracy and Islam co-exist. Bush also stressed that Turkey was a bridge between Europe and the Islamic world.
-- Washington, in principle, warmly welcomed Gul's effort to engage the UN in a comprehensive solution to the Cyprus problem. All sides will wait for the elections in February in southern Cyprus before taking any steps.
-- The Turkish side was very pleased when the US ensured that the Kirkuk referendum was postponed for at least six months and predicted the process might not occur in 2008 either.
-- It was striking to hear Bush say he could not believe Europeans cannot understand Turkey's importance concerning energy. Bush also reiterated his strong support for Turkey's EU membership. The Turkish side hopes Bush will speak with Sarkozy and Merkel in favor

of Turkey's membership.

-- The energy issue will weigh heavier than before in Turkish-American relations.

-- Following the Erdogan-Bush meeting on November 5 and the change in Washington's stance concerning the PKK, bilateral ties have improved. The rough years from 2003-2007 in bilateral relations are now in the past.

'Diyarbakir Bomber' Captured

All papers report twenty-three year old Erdal Polat was charged for his role in the January 3 car bomb attack in Diyarbakir. Polat served five months in prison for inciting PKK propaganda in 2002. After his release, Polat received two years of bomb training in the PKK camps in northern Iraq. Diyarbakir police also detained six others suspected of involvement in the explosion.

Meanwhile, the death toll in the bomb attack rose to six on Tuesday after another student died from injuries suffered in the blast.

AKP Can't Agree on Changes to Article 301

Sabah, Milliyet, Vatan, Taraf, Radikal and others: Papers report that the AKP Administration failed to agree on amendments to the Turkish Penal Code's Article 301. The party has decided that the draft should be discussed further. Because of this disagreement, the draft is now scheduled to go to the parliament next week. Liberal Radikal reports that Deputy PM Cemil Cicek insisted that filing a lawsuit based on the article should be possible with the permission of a special commission instead of the Justice Minister.

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Mainstream Sabah and Milliyet report MHP chairman Devlet Bahceli's comments that his party is completely against any amendment to Article 301.

PM Erdogan Criticizes DTP's Stance

Hurriyet, Sabah, Aksam, Milliyet, Radikal, Zaman, Yeni Safak: Addressing his party in parliament yesterday, PM Erdogan harshly criticized the mainly Kurdish party DTP for its refusal to denounce the PKK terrorist organization. Erdogan asked, "Why can't you take a clear stance against terrorism?" Condemning the bomb attack in Diyarbakir last week, Erdogan said "no social issue and no reason can justify terrorism. The only legitimate means to solve this issue is politics. Those who approve terrorism as an instrument become an accomplice to terrorism's violent actions."

TV Highlights

NTV

Domestic News

- The Turkish General Staff (TGS) announced Tuesday that 640 kg of ammonium nitrate was seized in a shelter in the eastern province of Van. Four primers, 10 meters of fuse, two dynamite slabs, one Kannas-type sniper, one Kalashnikov rifle, and 30 kg of heroin were also seized.

- Prime Minister Erdogan will contact Iranian President Ahmadinejad to ask him to resume the natural gas supply for Turkey.

- Parliament Speaker Koksal Toptan said the headscarf issue was a big social problem that must be resolved.

International News

- The OECD Working Group on Bribery announced it had serious concerns about Turkey's implementation of the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention. Turkey, a party to the convention since 2000, had yet to implement key elements of the agreement, the group said.

- The regional Kurdish administration in northern Iraq signed two new petroleum deals, including one with Turkish company Jinel Enjil, despite the objections of Baghdad.

- Greek Cypriots have decided to delay oil exploration in the

Eastern Mediterranean until the presidential elections in February.

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